

THE LEONARD LETTER

March 7, 2005

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

*"But what is Freedom? Rightly understood,
A universal license to be good."
-- Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849) Poet*

UNDER THE DOME

*****Democrats Blow Off Deadline*****

Governor Schwarzenegger said that the Legislature had until March 1 to implement meaningful reforms or he would take his ideas to the people. Thinking there was no support for the Governor's agenda, the majority Democrats called his bluff. Last week, on March 1, the Governor's office put out a release that discusses what will be put to the people. That release can be found here: <http://www.governor.ca.gov/> and click on his March 1st update. The main points are budget reform, state employee pension reform, redistricting, and a comprehensive education reform package including merit pay and expanded access to charter schools. The Democrats cannot say there was no warning. Let the people decide.

*****Do Not Be Afraid! Consider Toll Roads*****

The Reason Public Policy Institute has put out an interesting discussion paper on the state's transportation infrastructure (Policy Summary of Study 324). First the facts: California is expected to grow to 50 million people by 2030 and in the state's three largest urban areas, vehicle miles traveled by individuals will increase by 30 to 50 percent. We all know that our freeways seem to be nearing capacity already. The Reason paper shows why we cannot continue doing business as usual and still enjoy a good quality of life or compete with other states.

Even though the metropolitan planning organizations in the three largest urban regions -- Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego -- plan to spend nearly \$400 billion between now and 2030 (according to Reason) -- most of this money will be used to operate and maintain the current infrastructure that is already near capacity. In order to make California competitive with other fast growing states, Reason suggests we look at toll projects in other parts of the world to find solutions to our own long-term problems. Some adamantly oppose the very thought of toll roads, seeing them as a conspiracy to give fat cats a license to print money. However, how many people realize that toll roads

are being used successfully to alleviate gridlock in (gasp!) France and Canada of all places?

It takes a tremendous investment to make new highways, but the global capital market will invest in these roads if they charge tolls. A steady stream of money from tolls allows governments to float the massive bonds needed to fund the construction of these roads.

Here are a few examples of recent toll projects:

Toronto's \$2.6 billion Highway 407 Electronic Toll Road, a 67-mile new toll road with 43 interchanges and no toll booths, serving over 300,000 vehicles each weekday;

Paris' \$2 billion twin toll tunnels completed by tunneling deep below, rather than going through, historic Versailles; and

Melbourne's \$1.5 billion CityLink, connecting three freeways with the central business district largely underground to avoid disruptive land-use impacts -- like Toronto's above, it functions entirely without toll booths.

EDUCATION FOCUS

By the Numbers

Kudos to Diana Diamond, a columnist for the Palo Alto Daily News, for doing some research on teacher salaries and tenure. Diamond quotes EdSource research showing that the national average for teacher salaries is \$45,810 (2002-03) and that California salaries average \$56,283. Of Palo Alto's teachers' salary average for 2004-05--\$73,789--Diamond says, "Not too shabby." Diamond also discusses the process for a teacher obtaining tenure, saying, "[A] new teacher can be in the classroom for 16 months, and then get lifetime tenure their 17th month of teaching. And once they get tenure, it is very hard to get rid of a teacher. I can't think of any other job, particularly in the corporate world, that gives guaranteed lifetime employment-- plus a handsome retirement package--after only a year at work." She writes about a Palo Alto School Board Member who found that it would take \$500,000 to fire a tenured teacher who contested the termination. And she also tells about a change in state law that limits evaluation of teachers who have been on the job for more than 10 years and who have met or exceeded standards in previous evaluations. They only have to be evaluated once every five years. Of this Diamond observes, "Imagine a job evaluation once every five years. What an absolutely lovely arrangement and what unconflicted job security. This sure wouldn't happen in the corporate world." Diamond's points give plenty of food for thought as California thinks about changes needed to improve our public schools.

A point left out is that the California teacher's salary schedule is compressed. That is the starting teachers receive salaries high enough that there is less difference between them and a senior teacher than almost any other pay schedule for other professions. While this helps for recruiting new teachers, it works against retaining good teachers.

*****Math, New Math, Fuzzy Math, Anti-Fuzzy Math*****

If you are of my generation, you remember looking at your own children's math homework and thinking, "huh?" Our children were taught the "new math" and it did not make much sense to those of us who learned traditional math. Now our children, math-impaired as they generally are, are looking at our grandkids' homework and asking the same question. Mathematics itself is ancient and constant and necessary, but the manner in which it is taught in the U.S. has varied widely in the past few decades. We collectively groan when new test scores are released demonstrating just how poorly U.S. students perform in math compared to their international counterparts. If you have ever asked yourself how this sorry situation came to pass, then I encourage you to read the article "An A-Maze-ing Approach to Math," by Barry Garelick (see: <http://www.educationnext.org/20052/28.html>).

Garelick did his research while interning on Capitol Hill, but his frustration began before that, while he was trying to help his daughter do second grade math homework and while tutoring a ninth grader in geometry. He explains how mathematicians themselves have been removed from the curriculum process, that educational fads, textbook companies and national standards have had a stultifying effect on learning, and how reforms are stymied by fearful politicians. His article is a must-read for teachers, parents and school board members who hope to recapture the days when students could actually do basic addition, long division and multiplication, and thus be equipped to learn geometric proofs, calculus and other logic-driven subjects that will render them not just competitive with their global counterparts and functional in daily life.

MISCELLANY

*****Protecting Your Privacy*****

I saw an email going around last week that I found informative and wanted to share the information with my readers who are concerned with protecting your financial privacy. These tips were attributed to a corporate attorney and seem very practical and simple:

"1. The next time you order checks have only your initials (instead of first name) and last name put on them. If someone takes your checkbook, they will not know if you sign your checks with just your initials or your first name, but your bank will know how you sign your checks.

"2. Do not sign the back of your credit cards. Instead, put 'PHOTO ID REQUIRED.'

"3. When you are writing checks to pay on your credit card accounts, DO NOT put the complete account number on the 'for' line. Instead, just put the last four numbers. The

credit card company knows the rest of the number, and anyone who might be handling your check as it passes through all the check processing channels won't have access to it.

“4. Put your work phone # on your checks instead of your home phone. If you have a PO Box use that instead of your home address. If you do not have a PO Box, use your work address. Never have your SS# printed on your checks. You can add it if it is necessary. But if you have it printed, anyone can get it.

“5. Place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine. Do both sides of each license, credit card, etc. You will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call and cancel. Keep the photocopy in a safe place. I also carry a photocopy of my passport when traveling either here or abroad. We've all heard horror stories about fraud that's committed on us in stealing a name, address, Social Security number, credit cards.”

*****A Good Read*****

Human Events Online recommends the “*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*” as one of America’s greatest biographies. Frederick Douglass was born into slavery and worked in Baltimore’s shipyards. In 1840, when he was in his early 1920s, Douglass escaped and began traveling through the free states, explaining the horrors and realities of slavery. In 1845 he wrote this book, expounding on his lecture material and documenting how masters treated slaves, including separating them from their mothers while they were still infants. British supporters bought Douglass’s freedom in 1846, and he then returned to the States where he led the abolitionist movement.

BOE AND LEGISLATIVE DATES

February 1 – March 31, 2005 --- Application period for tax amnesty.

March 17, 2005 --- Legislature’s spring recess begins.

March 28, 2005 --- Cesar Chavez’s birthday observed.

March 29, 2005 --- Legislature reconvenes from spring recess.

April 29, 2005 --- Last day for policy committees to hear and report fiscal bills.

NOTABLE DATES/ HISTORY

March 7, 1917--- First jazz record released: "Dixie Jazz Band One Step," by Nick LaRocca, Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

March 7, 1965 --- Under the command of Alabama Governor George Wallace, police attacked African-Americans demonstrating for civil rights in Selma, AL.

March 8, 1930 --- William Howard Taft, the 27th President, died in Washington, D.C.

March 8, 1965 --- The first ground combat unit of 3,500 Marines landed in South Vietnam.

March 9, 1996 --- Actor-comedian George Burns died in Beverly Hills at the age of 100.

March 9, 1862 --- The ironclad vessels Monitor and Merrimac waged their famous Civil War naval battle at Hampton Roads, VA. The skirmish ended in a draw.

March 10, 1848 --- The Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago was ratified by the U.S. Senate, ending the war with Mexico.

March 10, 1876 --- Alexander Graham Bell made the famous telephone call to his assistant in the next room, saying, "Come here, Mr. Watson, I want you."

March 10, 1969 --- James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to assassinating Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

March 11, 1930 --- William Howard Taft became the first U.S. President to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

March 11, 1938 --- Hitler's Nazi troops invaded Austria.

March 11, 1985 --- Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin as the Soviet President.

March 12, 1864 --- Ulysses S. Grant became General-in-Chief of the Union Army.

March 13, 1462 --- Johannes Gutenberg printed the first Bible using moveable type.

March 13, 1852 --- The first picture of Uncle Sam was published (*New York Lantern*).

March 13, 1928 --- 450 people were killed when the St. Francis Dam collapsed near Los Angeles.

GENERAL TAX INFORMATION

For answers to your general tax questions, call the Board of Equalization information center. Customer service representatives are available to help you from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Friday (except state holidays).

Toll-free number: 800-400-7115
TDD service for the hearing impaired
TDD phones: 800-735-2929

Voice phones: 800-735-2922

To reach the Taxpayer Rights Advocate's office for assistance with any BOE issues, see <http://www.boe.ca.gov/tra/tra.htm>, or call toll-free 1-888-324-2798.

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